

# *Journey through the Great Depression*



Local History Series  
Book II



Edited by Laura Wheaton and Susan Hartzold



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Bloomington, Illinois  
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Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are courtesy *The Pantagraph*  
Cover design by Susan Hartzold



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# *Journey through the Great Depression*

## **Note to teachers:**

*Journey through the Great Depression* is an ideal companion to an eighth-grade full social science curriculum and satisfies the following Illinois Learning Standards as required by the Illinois State Board of Education:

Book text

English/Language Arts	Goals 1 and 5
Science	Goals 12b and 13b
Social Sciences	Goals 14-18
Fine Arts	Goal 27

Discussion questions

English/Language Arts	Goals 3 and 5
Science	Goals 12b and 13b
Social Sciences	Goals 14-18

## Introduction

For those who lived through it, the Great Depression of the 1930s was unforgettable. Faced with ever-changing conditions, the people of Central Illinois struggled to utilize the resources available to them and ultimately survive the hardships of the 11-year journey. The purpose of this book is to look at how local people experienced this era, and illustrate how McLean County was a prism for the nation's journey through the Great Depression.

*"I can remember as a child  
crying myself to sleep because  
I was hungry."*

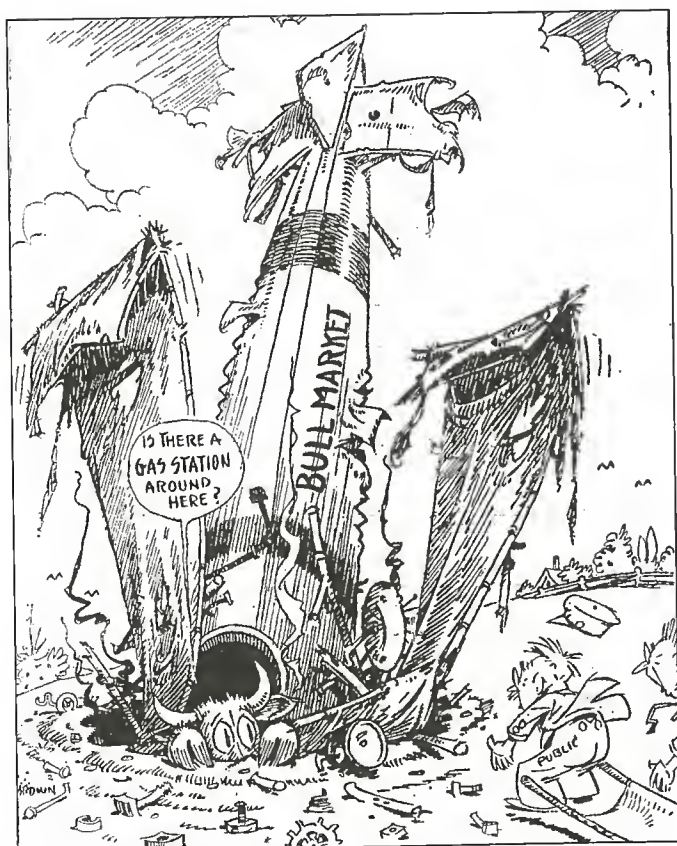
Priscilla Blakney



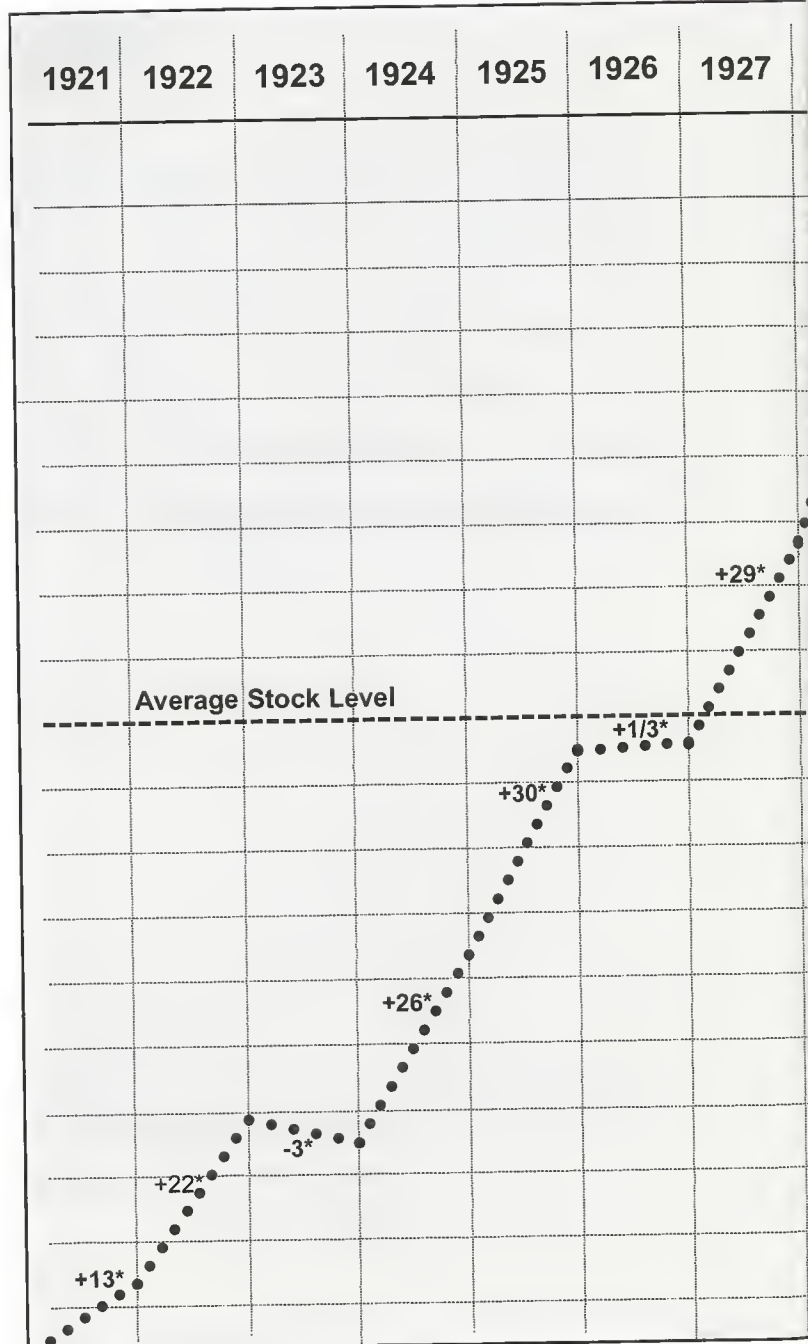
# A Screeching Halt

## The Crash

The rising **stock market** of the 1920s came to a screeching halt on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, ushering in the longest period of economic **depression** in United States history. Prices on the New York **Stock Exchange** (NYSE) have always been an indicator of the health of the U.S. **economy**. The trend in the 1920s of buying stock with borrowed money and using that income to buy more stock instead of repaying the loans made the market very unstable. When investors got nervous about the **market's stability**, they began selling stocks, causing the collapse of the whole system.



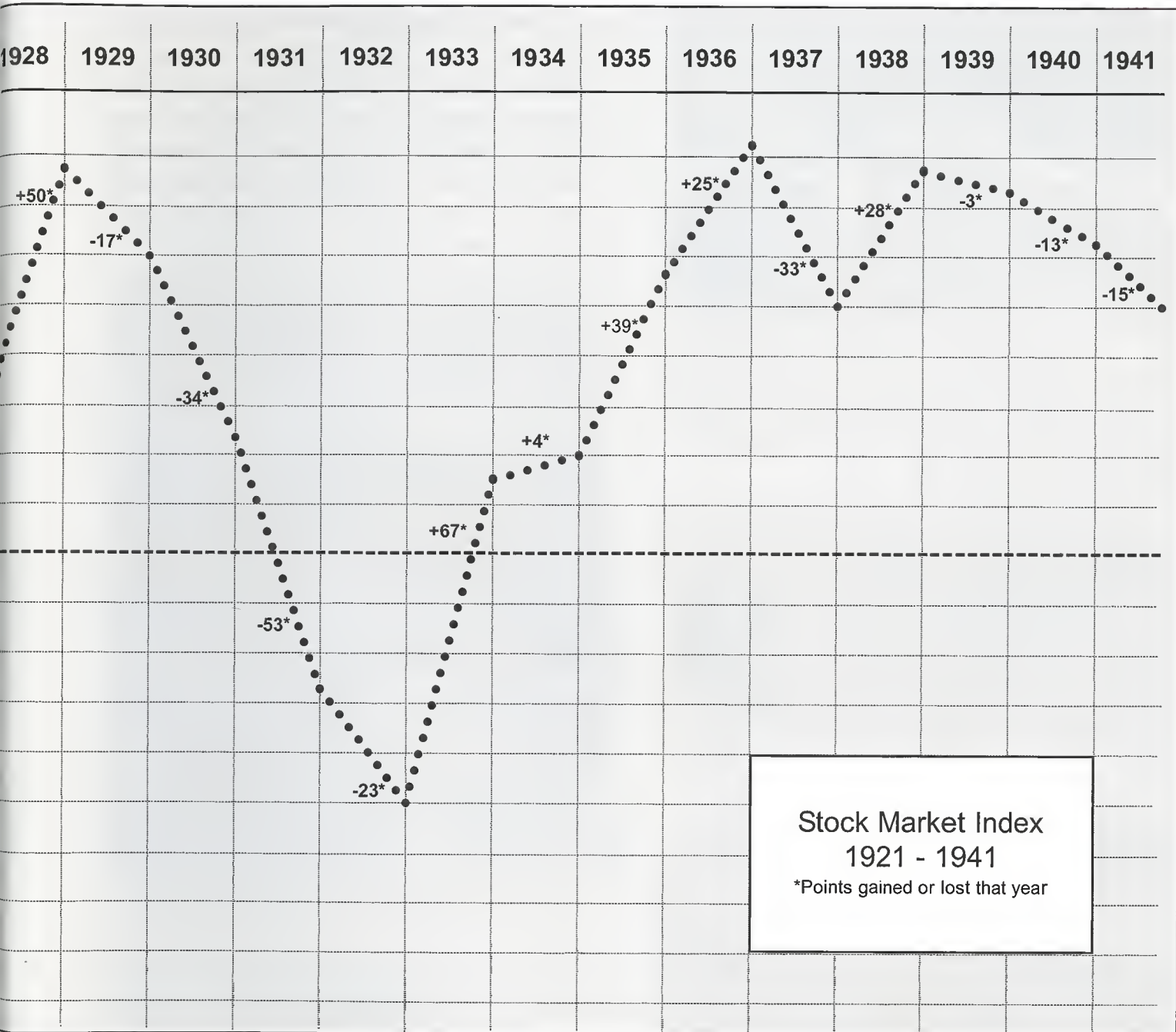
The day after the stock market crashed, readers of the *Daily Pantagraph* saw this cartoon when they opened their newspapers.



In the 1920s, the average price of stocks sold on the New York Stock on the NYSE was down by \$14 billion. Stocks continued to drop until

Many people believed that the crash was the first indicator of the struggling American economy. For farmers, however, the Depression began with the end of World War I.





exchange rose steadily. But on October 29, 1929, prices dropped dramatically. At the end of the day, the total value of stocks 1933, when business slowly began to recover.

American farmers had been encouraged to produce as much as possible to help feed the people of Europe. After the war, commodity prices collapsed when European farmers got

back to work. Low prices compounded by bank problems meant that many farms faced **foreclosure**. For people in McLean County the effects of recovery came more slowly.

# The Road Ahead

## Road Conditions

The Depression was characterized by falling prices, declining production, and high unemployment. In addition to farmers already struggling, those hit hard included the unemployed, laborers, middle- and working-class families and business owners. Local residents making the journey through this period faced a variety of difficult conditions.

Farmers worried not only about losing their farms, but also about new agricultural technologies. Nationally, about one-third of farmers lost their land to foreclosure.

The Hilton Farm in northwestern McLean County would have been foreclosed had Hilton not stood up for himself.

*"The times were so short, and Dad had to get a loan to get through the year. And the next year, the crops weren't good. He couldn't pay much on it. And the banker wanted his money. And he said, 'I'm going to foreclose on you.' And Dad said, 'Over my dead body you will. . . . I'm working as hard as I can and I'm giving you all I can give you. I don't have any more than what I bring in to you.'"*

Evelyn Hilton Schwoerer



Early in the Depression, few farmers could afford tractors. Those who could might be seen pulling their old horse equipment behind their new tractor.

1933) of the national labor force. The unemployed in McLean County struggled to scrape together a meager existence. Some depended on local charities. Others resorted to begging for food, shelter, or clothing. Many lost their homes or lived in poverty conditions. Victory Hall provided a home for kids whose parents could not afford to feed them.

With six children in the family and his father out of work, Kenneth Mann's parents believed the best alternative was to place three of the boys in Victory Hall and two daughters at the Lucy Orme Morgan Home. Mann stayed at Victory Hall from the time he was six until he was twelve. Victory Hall at 904 Hovey Avenue in Normal was home to around forty boys throughout the Depression.



Bloomington Chamber of Commerce

*"I got three square meals a day, a nice place to sleep, and I had friends. . . . On Saturdays, we'd walk uptown. We'd go to the YMCA and then we'd go to the Castle Theater to a movie, and then we'd walk back, back home to Victory Hall."*

Kenneth Mann

For laborers, declining production resulted in layoffs and reduced pay. As with many large companies across the country, the Chicago & Alton Railroad shops in Bloomington laid off hundreds of rail workers for months at a time, rehired them, and then laid them off again. During down times, these workers survived doing odd jobs. In this era of segregation and discrimination, those fired first were often African Americans.

Many risked everything for better pay and

Unemployment reached 30% (12.8 million in



working conditions by joining **unions** and striking. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 and the Wagner Act of 1935 were just two of the pro-union New Deal programs that helped the struggling union movement. In McLean County, six new labor unions were organized in Bloomington in 1934. Three more were organized in 1935, for a total of 34 unions associated with the Trades and Labor Assembly. Unions were formed for gas station attendants, beverage dispensers, stove mounters (assemblers), and foundry employees in the Hayes-Custer plant. A new local machinists union formed in the Williams Oil-O-Matic plant.



In 1937, employees of the Green Mill restaurant, located on West Washington Street in Bloomington, protested working conditions.

Middle- and working-class families with steady employment and income found conditions less difficult. Though wages and incomes were lower, so was the cost of food, shelter, and clothing. For most, any job was better than no job at all.

Business owners faced a drop in profits as consumer spending and production decreased and cash



In 1938, delivering coal may not have been Merrill Scheffert's career choice, but the steady income meant stability for his family.

flow declined. Those who invested heavily in the stock market felt the effects more severely, as drastic losses and poor economic conditions forced them to close businesses and relinquish many luxuries they were used to enjoying.

2002-451-408 THE DAILY PANTAGRAPH, BLOOMINGTON, ILL., THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 1930 17-2002

AFTER 25 YEARS OF HONORABLE DEALING—THIS STORE NOW GOING OUT OF BUSINESS!  
317 N. MAIN ST. **CHAS. O'MALLEY** Bloomington, Ill.

## QUITTING BUSINESS SALE

AMERICA'S FINEST NATIONALLY KNOWN BRANDS OF  
**CLOTHING & FURNISHINGS**

—NOW PLACED ON—  
**PUBLIC SALE**  
at Whatever Prices It Will Bring.

POSITIVELY! THE MOST STARTLING PRICE-WRECKING DEMONSTRATION EVER HELD!  
**SALE STARTS FRIDAY, JUNE 20th AT 9 A.M.**

Bloomington's Fine Old Clothing Store  
Selling Reliable Clothing for 25 Years

Entire Stock, Fixtures and  
Equipment Must Be Sold.

Order Stock, Fixtures and Equipment used to sell. Various odd lots.  
The property, the store and stock, to be sold at 9 A.M. on Friday, June 20th, at 9 A.M.  
The sale will be held at the store, 317 N. Main St., and will continue until the stock is sold.

Despite 25 years of success, Charles O'Malley closed his store in 1930. The *Daily Pantagraph* advertised the quitting business sale.

Ironically, the wealthiest people in the nation were only inconvenienced by the Depression. The richest 10% in the country held 39% of the **disposable income**, while the poorest 10% held only 2% of the disposable income. Local business owners, such as the Beich, Funk, and Williams families kept their fine homes, continued to have hired help, and maintained a lifestyle that included leisure activities.

# The Road Ahead

## A Lack of Cash

The economy was suffering from **deflation**, which meant that consumers could buy more with the same dollar. But at the same time they had fewer dollars of income to spend. The situation could have been eased by increasing the supply of money. But President Hoover feared **inflation**, which he believed would be the result if he increased the money supply. Rather than printing more bills he raised interest rates on borrowed money, causing more deflation. People hoarded what cash they had because there was none flowing in the economy.

*"It seems axiomatic that whenever a government fails to provide an adequate supply of currency or coin to maintain commercial trade, the people will step in to provide their own to fill the vacuum."*  
Ralph A. Mitchell and Neil Shafer

To alleviate the **cash flow** problem, many communities developed programs using **scrip** (alternatives to cash), a local solution to a national problem. In April 1933, the Bloomington

Association of Commerce established a scrip program. The program helped the unemployed find work, such as gardening, carpentry, and painting, with businesses that paid scrip instead of cash. The scrip could be used just like money at participating businesses, such as Livingston's department store. Both public and private institutions, such as Illinois Wesleyan University and Bloomington public schools, paid their teachers with scrip.



*"We got paid in scrip money. They would just give you a piece of money that you would hold and you could buy things."*

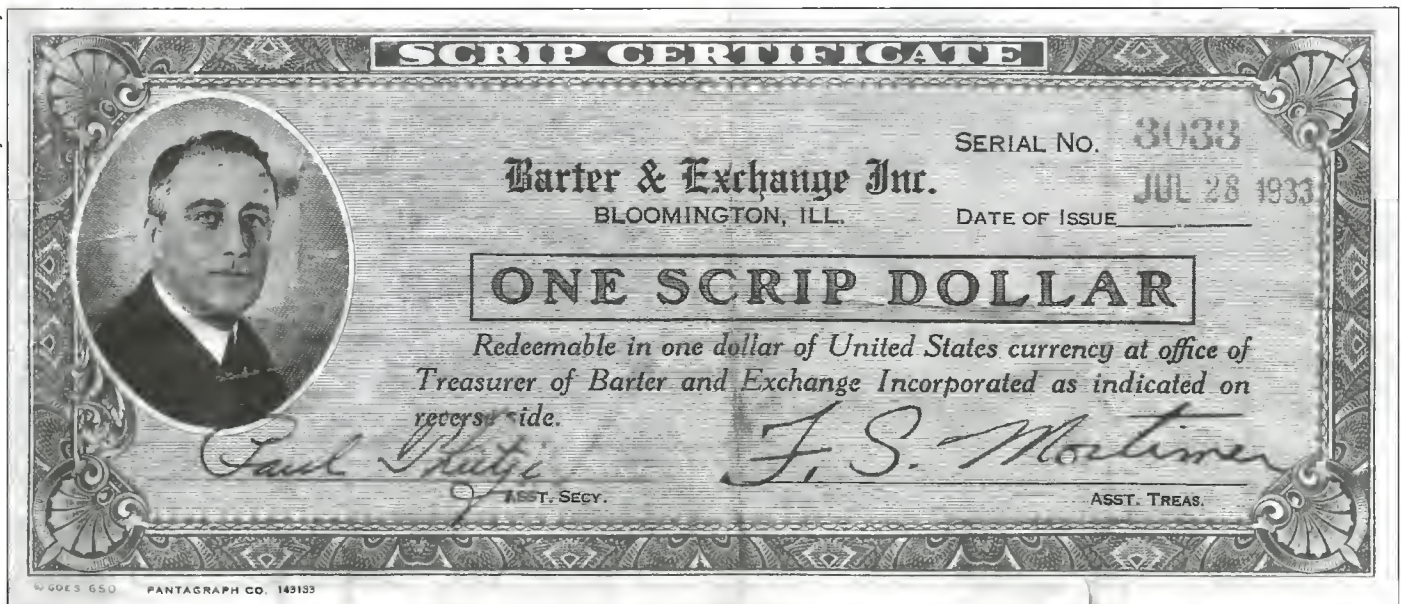
Lawrence Yeast

*"The faculty from the music school [at IWU] had no money to pay for food, but they were given scrip."*

Melba Kirkpatrick



Scrip programs were intended to be a temporary fix for each local community's economy. As the cash flow problems improved at the federal level, local scrip programs were discontinued.





In March 1936, the Association of Commerce in McLean County paid participants 47.5 cents on the dollar for the scrip and ended the successful program.

## Barter and Trade

In the practice of **barter and trade**, people exchanged goods and services for other goods and services, rather than using cash. For example, if a person went to the doctor, he or she might pay the bill by working in the doctor's yard or garden for a few hours. Or a farmer might exchange chickens and eggs at the grocery store for flour and kerosene.

*"We had a light plant back there years ago and that's how a lot of people paid for their light bill and their water bill. .. they'd go over there and work."*

Paul Penn



*"We did a lot of our purchasing through bartering. . . . We would trade butter and eggs at Imhoff's Store in Danvers for the things we needed which weren't much. . . . We needed condiments like sugar, salt and pepper. We needed flour and cornmeal . . . and we needed coffee and tea. But that's about all we had to buy outside of our clothes, obviously, and gasoline for the car."*

Bill Linneman



Local professionals, businesses, and even Illinois Wesleyan University accepted the practice of barter and trade in order to keep things running.

In August 1932, IWU announced that it would accept farm produce for tuition. The plan drew national coverage from the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times* and radio coverage from WGN. Paramount Films came to the



McLean County Historical Society

John T. Dickinson III arrived with a truckload of potatoes for his IWU tuition. President McPherson stood by for the delivery.

Wesleyan Campus to film registration day for a newsreel that was shown in movie theaters across the country.

# Detours and Dead Ends

## Detours . . .

For some, the challenges of the Depression meant finding a new route. Individuals who felt they were a burden on their loved ones or saw no future where they were sometimes chose to take to the road. Commonly referred to as **hobos**, they traveled the country, walking or hitching rides on trains to survive as best they could. Hobos looking for food were willing to do odd jobs, such as yard work and simple repairs. Locally, Depression transients were not considered dangerous, only down on their luck.

*"Just two blocks from our house on the other side of the railroad track there was a hobo jungle. Us kids used to go down there and talk to them. They'd be cooking something over a little open fire . . . some kind of a stew in an old tin can . . . you didn't have to be afraid . . . in fact they enjoyed talking to us neighborhood kids. . . . They were just people down on their luck, looking for a job to feed their family."*

Walt Bittner



This "hobo camp" was on the west side of Bloomington along the railroad tracks.

*"[W]e had hobos almost every noon for lunch . . . of course, they always wanted to do something to earn their meal. And my mom and dad never turned a hobo down."*

Florence Moews Ekstam



Banks also had to deviate from their usual route. Bank failures were reported throughout Illinois from 1929 to 1933. To calm jittery depositors and prevent future **runs** on open banks, Governor Horner proclaimed a three-day banking holiday in Illinois beginning March 4, 1933. President Roosevelt declared a four-day nation-wide bank holiday beginning March 6. When the holiday ended some banks reopened immediately. It was months before others opened, and some never reopened. While depositors at banks that did not reopen got money back, it was only a percentage of their original deposits.

Four local banks, the People's Bank of Bloomington, the First National of Normal, the Corn Belt Bank of Bloomington, and the Normal State Bank, reopened within the month. The American State Bank reopened in September. But the Farmers State Bank of Danvers, the Liberty State Bank of Bloomington, the National Bank and Trust of Bloomington, the Bellflower Bank, the First National Bank of LeRoy, and the Hudson State Bank closed and never reopened.

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## PUBLIC AUCTION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 1939

Farmers State Bank of Danvers, Danvers Illinois

GROUP 1 - ASSETS				GROUP 2 - LIABILITIES			
Item	Particulars	Amount	Balance	Item	Particulars	Amount	Balance
1	Cash	117.50		1	Notes Payable	100.00	
2	Accounts Receivable	100.00		2	Deposits	100.00	
3	Real Estate	100.00		3	Other Liabilities	100.00	
4	Investments	100.00		4	Total	300.00	
5	Other Assets	100.00		5	Total	300.00	
6	Total	517.50		6	Total	300.00	

CHARLES H. ALBERS, Receiver  
OF FARMERS STATE BANK OF DANVERS, DANVERS, ILLINOIS

Sale bill for liquidation of Farmers State Bank of Danvers





Customers of the People's Bank flocked in after the bank holiday. People's Bank and the First National Bank of Normal were the only local banks that reopened without restrictions immediately following the holiday.

### **... and Dead Ends**

For others, the challenges were too much to handle. Poor economic conditions forced numerous local companies to close their doors, including many that had been doing business for years.

Bloomington Chamber of Commerce

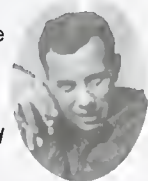


In 1931 My Store, a long successful and popular store located on the northeast corner of Center and Grove Streets, closed as a result of poor management and economic conditions.

A few people, unable to face their losses, provide for loved ones, or cope with conditions, committed suicide. The resulting emotional trauma felt by their families was devastating. Consequently, some families lost their only source of income, some had to go on relief, and others may have lost their homes.

The City of Bloomington reported an average of 10 suicides per year between 1930 and 1939, 66 percent more than recorded in the previous decade.

*"My Uncle Henry hung himself on the tree there not too long after I joined the CCCs. . . . He was very despondent. He was a tenant farmer trying to run the farm by himself. I guess it was too much work for him. If I'd stayed. . . . I left in October and he killed himself before Christmas."*



Karl Blakney

Some who took this route may have done so hoping that money from their life insurance would cover family expenses. Bloomington-based State Farm Insurance required one year of policy ownership before death benefits were paid to families of suicides. By the mid-1930s, this had increased to two years, and doubled again by the end of the decade.

# Mapping a Route for Home Survival

## Families Pulled Together

To survive the journey through the Great Depression, families needed every member to contribute. Times necessitated a big garden, chickens, and often a cow or other livestock. Families frequently hunted wild game for food. They pinched pennies and used every possible resource. Women working in the home did many things to help keep the family going. Some took in sewing or laundry. Others used their baking skills to make pies, cakes,

*"We had two huge gardens. We grew and canned I don't know how many kinds of vegetables for the fruit cellar. Also we put up pork in jars. Of course, we had hams and bacon hanging from the joist in the smoke house. . . . We had chickens and ducks walking around out there just waiting for the roasting pan. We collected eggs every day, milk and cream which we turned into cottage cheese and other cheese and butter. . . . Well, I had to help Mother feed the chickens and I had to help collect eggs. Basically, I had to churn, churn cream into butter. My brother and I had to milk a Jersey cow."*



Bill Linneman

*"She [Mom] used to work a couple of months every year at a canning factory peeling tomatoes. . . . That is how we bought our school clothes, out there peeling tomatoes."*

Paul Penn



These women prepared tomatoes at the Lutz Canning factory in Bloomington.

preserves, or other food items to be sold at the farmers market or to restaurants. Many wives earned additional income at part-time seasonal jobs. In some cases the wife became the major breadwinner. This was especially true if the husband was disabled or unemployed.



Florence, Francis, and Butch Moews and Bill Meyer pose with their catch of fish from Money Creek.

*"[Dad] used to salvage wood and old bricks and bring them home. And my brother and I had to clean the nails out of the wood and stack it. And the bricks, we'd have to knock the mortar off of them and stack the bricks so they were neat, and then Dad would use that to repair houses or whatever jobs he could get."*



Florence Moews Ekstam



## Farm Life versus Town Life

### On the Farm

Across the United States most rural homes didn't have electricity until the late 1930s. In a farm kitchen of the era, meals might be prepared on a stove heated by wood, oil, coal or propane/natural gas. Iceboxes were the prevalent mode of keeping food cool, since refrigerators were expensive and required electricity.



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A McLean County privy

Many rural homes also lacked indoor plumbing. This meant lugging water in from an outside well or pump. It also meant families had a **privy** instead of a bathroom with running water and a flushing toilet. Even with indoor plumbing, farm wives worked especially hard.

A supply of canned meat, fruits, and vegetables was necessary if a farm family was to survive the winter. The work involved in keeping a large garden, chickens, cows and other livestock in addition to the labor required to prepare and can these items kept a farm family busy.

*"[M]y mother was very busy as a housekeeper . . . a farm at that time had no electricity. We had no running water. We had no central heat. She was busy doing things like pumping water and scrubbing clothes by hand, and, of course, cooking."*

Bill Linneman

*"Mother had a sewing machine, a little Singer sewing machine with a pedal . . . there wasn't any electricity. It didn't come through until 1939. . . . She didn't have a refrigerator . . . in 1939 the electricity came through, and then you could go out and buy a refrigerator."*

### In Town

Homes in the city were more likely to have electricity. However, having electrical power available did not mean a family could afford to pay for it or that their home was wired for it. Homes with modern electrical appliances, such as washing machines, stoves, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and sewing machines meant house work was less labor intensive. Additionally, indoor plumbing eliminated the need to carry water into the home or to go outside to use the privy.

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Mrs. G. E. Noggle canned meats, fruits, and vegetables using the latest canning technology. Her gauged pressure cooker heated the jars and their contents to the correct temperature, killing any bacteria and preserving the contents' "healthful" qualities. She used a wood-burning stove. Notice the bucket of corn cobs used to start the fire in her stove.

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Canned goods for the winter



Evelyn Hilton Schwoerer

# Mapping a Route for Home Survival

## Being Resourceful

Unable to find work, some individuals took control of their lives by starting their own businesses, such as boarding houses, sales and service companies, and restaurants.

*"We had five rooms, my sister and I and my mother. . . she rented out all the other rooms to the miners and then she ran that little restaurant. . . . She fed the miners and people would walk off the street, and they'd sit down and eat, too. . . that's how she made her living."*

Walt Bittner



In 1932 Gus and Edith Belt, owners of a Shell gas station on Main Street in Normal, decided to offer all-you-can-eat fried chicken, plus fries and slaw for 45 cents. With a year of success behind them, in 1933 they began offering steakburgers and curb service. In 1934 they turned the gas station into a drive-in, renamed the Whitehouse Steak n Shake. By 1937 they had three Steak n Shakes in Bloomington, and eight in Central Illinois by 1939. Today there are over 400 Steak n Shake restaurants across the United States.



In 1932 Benjamin and Gladys Nybakke decided to open a vacuum sales and service shop. Gladys was expecting their first child, and Benjamin was tired of working as a traveling salesman. They purchased a home at 1404 N. Main in Bloomington and lived on the second floor while running the business out of the first. The successful business became Nybakke Vacuum Shop in the 1940s and continues to do business today.

For many young adults, having a job was necessary. The added income helped fulfill needs at home. Others did seasonal work. Some dropped out of school to contribute financially.

*"[E]very morning, before school, I went over and washed the milk buckets, the separator, and all the milk bottles. . . . And Mrs. McIntyre had strokes so I'd get her up and get her dressed and get her breakfast. And then I'd go to school. After school I went over and washed the darn things all over again. . . going there twice a day, I got a dollar a week. In the summertime, I'd stay there all day long and cook for her and take care of her, and I got two dollars a week."*

Priscilla Brading Blakney



*"I used to shovel snow. . . there was a big snow right at Christmas time. . . . I made enough money that I bought some Christmas presents for my mother and my dad and my step-dad and Joyce and my brother and helped mom get some groceries for Christmas. I will never forget that."*

Paul Penn



Children could be very resourceful, collecting cans, bottles, and other recyclables in order to trade them in for a few pennies to purchase a small treat or a trip to the movies.

*"Saturday was the day to go to the show. . . . I'd get up early on Saturday morning. . . go through the alleys and I could get ten milk bottles. I could take them to Schnieder's store on Front Street and get a penny for each bottle. Ten cents, bam! You're in the theater for a dime."*

Dave Graves



## A Family's Last Resort

When resources ran out, alternate routes were taken, some more acceptable than others. Going on relief was a last resort because people often



felt ashamed if they accepted help. Yet as many as 13,318 local individuals (18% of the population) were desperate enough to go on relief. Frequently, those who sought relief were widows or women with children whose husbands had abandoned them. Statewide as much as 25% of the population was on relief sometime during 1934 and 1935.

*"St. Joe's had a soup kitchen down here on Jackson. . . . One man up here in the next block used to go out and wasn't ashamed to do it. He'd go out there every day. It kind of eased up the family so they could have more, if he was eating at the soup kitchen."*

Bob Daley



Men and boys could get a free handout at this unidentified local soup kitchen.

*"My two brother-in-laws spent a night in jail because they were stealing cabbage out of one of those community gardens. They had to do something to feed the family. . . . They spent one night in jail that was all."*

Karl Blakney



*"My mother was too proud to take relief. She said we'd rather work for what we make, and so we never did take a handout from anybody."*

Walt Bittner



In Bloomington individuals and families began to receive cash disbursements from the relief office in 1936.

Those who signed up for relief earned food and supplies for labor, or they could pick up food at relief stations. Desperation also led to illegal acts.

# Mapping a Route for Community Survival

President Hoover worried that a national welfare program would discourage people from helping themselves out of hard times. Instead, he lowered taxes for big corporations, expecting that the benefits would "trickle down" to the citizens. Communities realized that not enough was trickling down. To help neighbors survive the journey, local business and organizations banded together to provide food, clothing, shelter, and jobs for needy citizens. Federal aid started coming after the presidential election of 1932 when the new president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, began his New Deal programs.

## *Businesses Lead the Way*

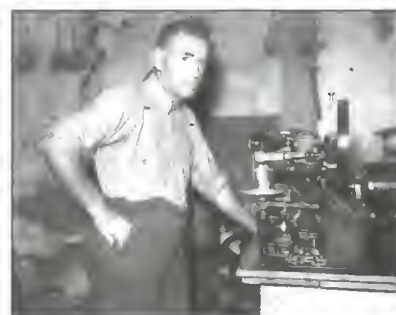
Relief efforts by groups like Bloomington's Association of Commerce had a tremendous effect on the community as a whole, and especially on the unemployed. The Association organized the Bloomington Civic Relief Committee in 1932, when local officials learned that state aid would not be available for two months and that local funds were indebted to the tune of \$8,000. With the assistance of the American Legion and the Trades and Labor Assembly, the committee organized relief garden projects and canning of produce from the gardens.



One hundred unemployed men reported daily to harvest tomatoes and beans at this Bloomington relief garden. The produce was exchanged at the Lutz canning factory for an equal value of canned produce.



At the Normal canning factory, relief workers prepared 300 cans of food a day. Albert Armstrong and Nannie Lewis (left) cut corn from the cob, Joseph Carroll (below left) filled cans with cut corn, and J. F. McClintock (below right) operated the machine that sealed the lids on the cans.



In early 1933, Gridley farmer Paul Beshar developed a farm relief plan that used grain alcohol in motor fuel. With the assistance of the Bloomington Association of Commerce and the Farm Bureau, Beshar's plan gained

*"Alcoholized gasoline will provide the new market we need for corn and other agricultural products."*

W. E. Froelich



*"Scores of farmers and Bloomington residents had their automobiles filled with the new 'High-Ball' alcoholized gasoline shortly after the arrival in town of 800 gallons of 200 proof grain alcohol released by the government for a public test of the Beshar plan of farm relief."*

The Daily Pantagraph



national support. The Bloomington Association of Commerce worked to organize a public trial of alcoholized gasoline (ethanol). Thirteen Illinois Farm Bureau oil companies participated in the trial. The plan ultimately failed when demand for petroleum-based fuel increased during World War II.

With the idea that buying and hiring would help the economy, local campaigns by the Unemployment Commission and Civic Relief Commission attempted to increase community involvement. Local consumers were encouraged to spend more, businesses to add employees,

and housewives to hire unemployed girls for housework. Similar campaigns were going on across the nation.

Dissatisfied with the aid being distributed by the County Relief Agency, the local Socialist Party formed the Unemployment Council. The Council held demonstrations in front of the Bloomington Civic Relief Headquarters.

*"Forty or more of us had been meeting at the Unitarian Church, doing what we could to get relief for those in dire need. The local county relief agency, of course, could not handle the large numbers of people needing help. For the situation was now becoming very bad and we knew of the runaround and red tape people had to endure to get a handout."*

H. C. Mayer, Unemployment Council member



**"Of course Anne was shrewd . . . she did her buying in '32 when prices were so low!"**

*"Has Anne ever let you peep into it? There's still plenty of evidence of the shrewdness she exercised in 1932. Toilet paper purchased in large quantities and at enormous discounts when compared with today's prices!"*

*"Anne's husband, too, wasn't a bit behind her. He was a big capitalist, these exceedingly low 1932 prices of pearls and that gorgeous dinner are examples of what bargains in jewelry 1932."*

*"Diamonds were marvelous investments long as this merry world of ours goes on. . . woman who bought diamonds in 1932 . . . show a fine profit today."*

*"Anne's fur coat is another tribute to her shrewdness."*

**BUY!**

The *Daily Pantagraph* ran this ad, (above) encouraging consumers to buy while prices were low. In a national campaign, the auto industry used this advertisement (right) to encourage car sales.

When You

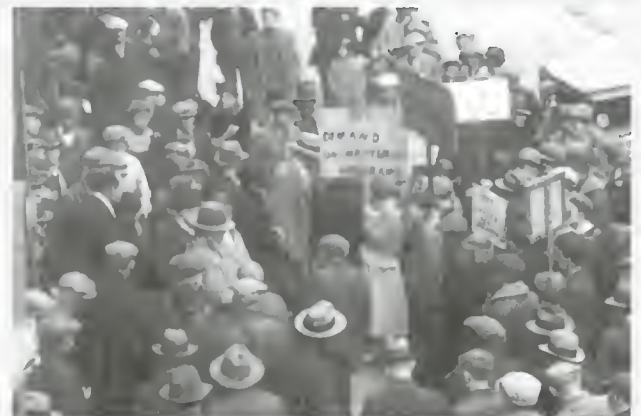
**BUY an AUTOMOBILE**

You GIVE

**3 Months' Work**

to Someone

Which Allows Him to **BUY OTHER PRODUCTS**

The Council held demonstrations in front of the Bloomington Civic Relief Headquarters protesting relief practices and lobbied for utility rate relief for the unemployed, unemployment insurance, and World War I veterans' bonuses.

Bloomington Socialist Party pin, circa 1933



In the early 1930s, the Unemployment Council started a large cooperative garden. Garden workers received produce credits for each hour worked, based on the size of the worker's family.

# Mapping a Route for Community Survival

## Charities Step Up

Locally, privately run charities looked to Bloomington's United Welfare Campaign/Community Chest for greater assistance. Through the combined efforts of individuals

The Baby Fold cared for children under the age of six whose parents had died or were unable to care for them. In 1930, 84 babies stretched its capacity. When they reached the age of six, children who were not returned to their parents or adopted moved to other agencies, such as the Morgan Home and Victory Hall.



The Lucy Orme Morgan Home at 403 South State Street in Bloomington cared for girls who were orphans or whose parents were unable to support them. In the depths of the Depression the Home cared for an average of 40 to 60 girls and served as many as 70.

Black children over the age of six went to the Colored Children's Home, which was also supported by the United Welfare Campaign.



and public and private organizations, the United Welfare Campaign raised funds that supported up to 16 local charities. Through the early years of the Depression, the United Welfare Campaign struggled to raise funds to meet the growing needs of the agencies it served. In 1935 the Campaign reorganized as the Community Chest, doubled its goal, and successfully raised \$53,774 - more than twice the amount raised in 1934.

*"There in the company of about 25 others. . . I take a clean appearing meal of liver and onions, tomatoes, plenty of bread and coffee. This was given gratis, no questions being asked."*

John Paul Jones  
an IWU student posing as a transient



Shelper's Home Sweet Home Mission was another agency that benefited from the Campaign. The Mission offered food, clothing, lodging, and spiritual motivation to the transient and the homeless 365 days a year. In 1935 they served nearly 40,000 meals with the assistance of the local United Welfare organization. In 1938 the Mission gave out 3,277 loaves of bread; served 34,564 meals; and paid for 30 funeral services.



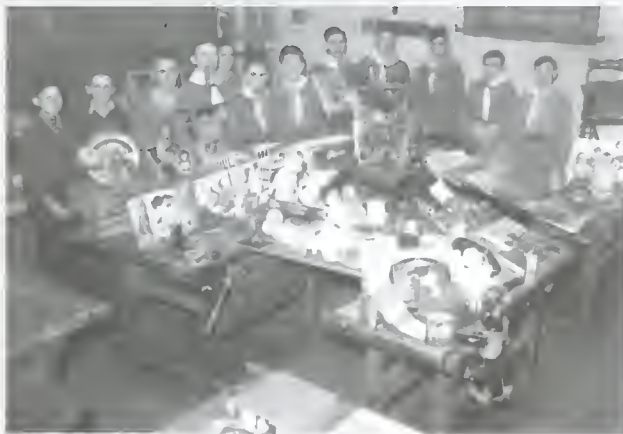
*"The Welfare Foundation Fund Drive is virtually a war - war on hunger, cold, sickness and despair, the four grim horsemen who harry the victims of depression and personal misfortune."*

Ben S. Rhodes,  
Bloomington Mayor, 1930



The *Pantagraph*-sponsored Goodfellow Fund helped needy families at Christmas time. Through the fund, volunteers gathered and distributed donations of cash, clothing, furniture

Boy Scout troop 29, of Normal, collected and reconditioned used toys for the Goodfellow Fund.



Despite public efforts, not every child had happy holidays.



*"I got one boxing glove for Christmas one year. What do you do with one boxing glove? And then I got a coloring book, real nice hardback cover coloring book, but no crayons. What do you do with a coloring book but no . . . my recollections of Christmas are not happy times; kind of sad, really."*

Dave Graves

and coal, or anything else that might help make Christmas happier for destitute families and children housed at social service agencies.

# Fixing a Flat Economy

## Republicans Face a Roadblock

President Hoover and the Republican Party bore the brunt of Americans' dissatisfaction with the economy in the 1932 election. New York governor and Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt soundly defeated Hoover, and even carried McLean County, a bastion of Republicanism.

	Roosevelt (Democrat)	Hoover (Republican)
Popular votes:	22,821,857	15,761,841
Electoral votes:	472	59
McLean County votes:	18,908	15,406

In the 1932 Democratic sweep, incumbent governor Len Small was defeated by Henry Horner. Lynn Sieberns, a Gridley Democrat, upset Republican incumbent Florence Fifer Bohrer, the first woman elected to the Illinois Senate, and Frank Gillespie ousted Republican Harnett Hall from his congressional seat. The following spring, in an unusually large turnout, Bloomington residents ousted Mayor Rhodes, voting in Democrat Louis Wellmerling.



*"Well [Bloomington is] such a Republican stronghold . . . it was a perfectly shocking incident when it happened."*

Margaret Poulton Esposito

*"[M]y father was a Democrat . . . he just thought Governor Horner was the best Governor we'd had for years and years."*

Francis Irvin

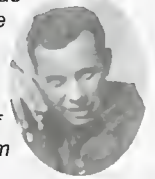


## Alphabet Soup - Roosevelt's New Deal

President Roosevelt's fix for America's ailing economy was the "New Deal." He immediately created programs that stimulated the economy,

and brought relief, employment, protective labor laws, and public improvements on local, state and national levels. Through these programs, government became more intimately entwined in the lives of individual citizens.

*"Roosevelt was a remarkable man . . . he was inaugurated March 4. Now by the end of March he had got Congress to pass a bill establishing the three Cs, and by the 17th of April the first man was signed up. Now that was really fast action. And that right away took an awful lot of the young people off the streets, gave them something to do, gave them a lot of hope."*



Karl Blakney

## The CCCs

The Civilian Conservation Corps program offered six months of employment, a home and food, as well as vocational and remedial education for single men aged 17-23 years old whose families were on public relief. Recruits worked to preserve natural resources and improve facilities at national parks, forests, campgrounds and historic sites. Of the \$30 monthly pay, \$25 was sent home to the recruit's family. CCC camps at LeRoy and Congerville brought in recruits from outside Illinois, and local boys shipped out to camps in Oregon and Wisconsin.

### Camp LeRoy

CCC boys from Ohio and Michigan began arriving at Camp LeRoy on May 2, 1934. Working within a 30-mile radius of LeRoy, they dug ditches, built dams and terraces, and planted over 130,000 trees. During leisure hours, CCC boys dated local girls and



LeRoy CCC boys building dams

enjoyed community activities like church suppers. They formed a softball team and join the local Kitten-ball league. They also built a boxing ring and held tournaments. Some married local women and stayed after the camp closed in 1940.



### Camp Eureka

Located near Congerville, Camp Eureka opened in August 1934. The primary duty of the men of Camp Eureka, like that of Camp LeRoy, was soil erosion control. Camp Eureka closed in the fall of 1938, and its company transferred to Nevada.

*"While intense heat waves continue to penetrate parched acres of Central Illinois farm lands, hundreds of sun-tanned youths--most of them stripped to the waist--are working diligently to anchor wayward soil for the deluge that is sure to follow the drought . . . anchoring themselves as a vital part of a new kind of American citizenship. . . . They are Civilian Conservation Corps boys, enlisted in the most popular of all New Deal projects."*

*Daily Pantagraph, July 5, 1936*

### Gold Beach Oregon

Nearly 200 McLean County boys entering the CCC were shipped out to Fort Sheridan and then to Gold Beach, Oregon where they performed forestry and conservation work. Henry Brown credits the CCC with turning him around and helping a lot of people to earn money during the Depression.

*"The Depression messed up a lot of people. I got off on the wrong foot, but this caseworker talked me into going to the CCC camp."*

Henry Brown

Karl Blakney



*"I went down to the old post office on the corner of Jefferson and East street and asked about it and they signed me up right away . . . was sent out to Oregon, Company #1652 at Gold Beach, Oregon, 30 miles north of the California border. We were the farthest west company in the United States. . . that three Cs was one of the best ideas that ever happened in this country."*

Karl Blakney

Cutting paths into the cliffs along the beach was part of the work performed by McLean County CCC boys at Gold Beach, Oregon.

In its nine years of existence, the CCC took some 2.5 million young men from the ranks of the unemployed.

### The CWA

In November 1933, Roosevelt created the Civil Works Act. The act moved federal public-works funds into civil works projects and provided employment for those on relief. Tax-supported businesses, such as cities, villages, townships,

and school, sanitary, and drainage districts, could obtain the labor free by providing the materials and supervisors. By the end of the year, 2,225 men and women had been put to work 30 hours a week on 85 civil works projects in McLean County, receiving wages within that time totaling approximately \$140,000. The Civil Works Administration was a radically different approach to the problem of unemployment. Pressure from conservative Democrats and Republicans' criticism of waste forced Roosevelt to end the program in early 1934.

Area Civil Works Projects included:

- Repairing, grading, graveling and making shoulders and ditches for country roads and state routes
- Tearing up old streetcar tracks and paving in Bloomington
- Laying water mains in Bloomington
- Planting trees and landscaping Lake Bloomington
- Repairing school buildings
- Repairing bath houses at Lake Bloomington and Miller Park
- Cleaning and repairing drainage ditches



WPA workers lay asphalt on the runway at Bloomington's new airport, a CWA project.

Federal work projects were established primarily to bring employment to men. However, one local CWA project for women was a garment shop set up in the ballroom of the McBarnes Memorial Building. In January 1934, the shop employed 145 women.



*"The CWA has done a definite good. An average of \$30,000 per week has flowed into McLean County for many weeks. Those to whom this money was paid rendered a much-needed service by the work they performed."*

*Daily Pantagraph, February 28, 1934*

# Fixing a Flat Economy

## The AAA

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, signed into law on May 12, 1933, authorized the federal government to control production of farm-grown produce. In 1935 the AAA paid \$550 million to farmers across the nation. In Central Illinois, the program "controlled the market" by paying farmers for limiting the number of acres of corn and wheat planted. This would keep prices at a stable and profitable level. The program also "sealed" corn into storage so that it would be available if shortages occurred. As the farm relief program raised farm income, consumers began complaining of higher food prices. The act relieved some of the overproduction problems in 1934 and 1935, but in January of 1936 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the key provision that allowed control of production levels.

This area farmer (right) protested low prices by burning his surplus crop. Below, an AAA official checks the lock on corn being stored locally for possible shortages.



Some local farmers defended the results of the act:

*"Agriculture financed a large portion of the depression by providing food and fiber at a cost of next to nothing during the worst depression years and it is no wonder that uninformed consumers might think that they should continue to enjoy the benefits of such low food prices when this is obviously impossible."*

Floyd C. Thomas, Heyworth,  
Chairman of the McLean County Corn-Hog Committee, 1936

Other farmers objected to the AAA program:

*"[T]he program is unfair, and too complex for the average person to understand . . . all farm ills are not a result of over production. Money would be better spent finding additional uses for crops, such as alcohol gas . . . especially in the southern states, [where] taking land out of production only puts laborers out of work."*

Grover Helm  
Farmer and President of the National Bank of Bloomington



Democrats, in general, felt that farmers were getting an unnecessary handout, as indicated by this political cartoon, seen by *Daily Pantagraph* readers in the November 11, 1935 edition.

## FERA

On May 12, 1933, Congress also authorized the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, granting \$500 million in federal funds to state



and local unemployment relief programs. McLean County's Emergency Relief office dispensed aid provided by both the FERA and the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission (IERC). They took applications for relief, made decisions regarding who was eligible for relief aid, processed grocery and other orders and distributed federal baskets of surplus food. In May 1935 the McLean County Relief Agency was feeding over 13,000 clients, about 18 percent of the county's population. In March 1936, the office began issuing cash relief for the first time.

*"Well, I knew a lot of families that were on relief. And we just barely were not on relief because my father had a job as a night watchman. But I can remember my grandmother was on relief. Her husband had died many years before and she was alone. . . . My grandmother got food delivered to her house . . . a big box. And it had a lot of rice in it and she didn't like rice. I remember that. . . . She wanted flour because she baked her own bread. And she was proud. She didn't like being on relief and receiving a box of food. So we helped her, my mother helped her as best she could but there was not too much money to help her with."*

Francis Irvin



Relief workers lay bricks on Clinton Street in Normal in 1933.



McLean County's Emergency Relief office

Because the County Relief office also certified the eligibility of people seeking relief, it was sometimes the target of picketing by the socialist Unemployment Council.



### The NIRA/NRA

The National Industrial Recovery Act, passed by Congress on June 16, 1933, was meant to spur industrial recovery and employment. It encouraged manufacturers and service industries to establish legally enforceable industry-wide codes for themselves. Through its agency, the National Recovery Administration, the act required each industry to set maximum hours, minimum wages, safe working conditions, and the right of labor to organize. Local citizens campaigned to ensure that local businessmen agreed to the codes created by their industry's national associations.

By mid-September, the *Daily Pantagraph* reported that 1,000 employers in the Twin Cities had become members of the NRA, and 6,000 families had signed the NRA consumer's pledge of cooperation.



The Blue Eagle emblem of the NRA was proudly placed in the windows of participating businesses. Doctors, grocers, shoe shiners, restaurateurs, barbers, ice cream manufacturers, beauty shop operators, insurance men, printers, and photographers all participated in the NRA program.



# Fixing a Flat Economy



The NRA campaign was topped off with a "Victory Parade."

Early in 1934 local business owners supported President Roosevelt and the NRA. But by late 1934, attitudes began to change. Small producers believed the industrial codes discriminated against them, business resented the labor provisions, and labor resorted to strikes to unionize and bargain collectively as guaranteed by the NIRA. On May 27, 1935, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the code system unconstitutional. Key labor provisions of the NIRA were later revived in the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, but the code system was dead.

## Local Businesses Challenge NIRA

In October 1934, the Hayes-Custer Stove and Furnace Company filed an injunction in federal court in Springfield to prevent being forced to pay the minimum wage set forth by its NRA industry code. The company maintained that the regional wage differences allowed by the code favored southern states where the minimum wage was 27.5 cents as opposed to 33.5 cents in the northern states.

Unlike most manufacturers, Williams Oil-O-Matic almost doubled their payroll of 189 in 1929 to 336 in 1934. It quickly met NRA requirements, increasing pay to a minimum of 50 cents an hour and decreasing hours from 50 to 40 a week. But once the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional, management dropped wages to 40 cents. The result was a workers' strike in 1937.

## Opposing Views

### In Favor of NIRA.

*"I am entirely in sympathy with the NRA for I know that it is helping conditions. I feel that President Roosevelt is our friend and is on the right track. I feel that we are going to pull right out of the depression."*  
W.H. Roland, department store owner

*"I think conditions are improving. They should improve more rapidly when all the codes are approved. . . . The NRA is having a good effect; there is more confidence as we enter the new year, and this is important."*

Paul F. Beich, president of Paul F. Beich Co.

### Against NIRA

*"It's an odd thing, but the stove plants under the NRA are all having labor trouble and the ones not under it are getting along all right. This NRA seems to have turned the workers' heads."*

Judge Frank H. Hayes,  
chairman of the board of Hayes-Custer Stove Co.

## PWA

The Public Works Administration was another arm of the NIRA that was designed to create jobs by building monumental projects, such as the Normal Post Office in 1933 and the construction of Sheridan and Lincoln Schools in Bloomington in 1934. Between 1933 and 1939, the Public Works Administration financed PWA projects across the nation, investing more than \$6 billion and 4.75 billion work-hours of labor in the construction of new hospitals, city halls and courthouses, sewage disposal plants, and educational buildings.

## WPA

The Works Progress Administration was launched with the passage of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 8, 1935. The act authorized \$4.8 billion for the existing PWA and CCC programs and for a new program, the WPA. Through this program money was granted to states to use as they saw fit. The WPA became the biggest and best

known of the work relief projects, averaging an enrollment of two million people during its seven-year history, nearly one third of the nation's unemployed. Workers completed an astonishing variety of jobs, from construction to playground supervision. The program removed the federal government from "the business of relief" and returned control to states and local units of government.

Local WPA projects included but were not limited to:

- Installation of sewer lines
- Road work
- Miller Park and O'Neill Park improvements
- Streetcar rail removal projects in Bloomington and Normal
- Highland Golf Course
- Inventory of McLean County Historical Society collection
- Preparation of school lunches for 14 McLean County schools



"Don't know where we're going, but we're going to work!" reads the caption under this *Daily Pantagraph* picture showing WPA workers headed off to a job site.

The WPA did a better job than previous work programs at providing employment opportunities for women and minorities.

*"The best job he ever had, that I can recall, was on the WPA when they started road construction and things like that."*

Arlene Murray, about her father, Alonzo Walton

In McLean County, women found work in sewing and playground supervision projects, in book binding for the public libraries, as teachers in adult education and music instruction, and as dieticians and cooks in school lunch programs. In August 1936 there were 40 projects in McLean County employing 2,102 people. Twenty-eight were construction projects employing 1,913 people and 12 were women's and professional projects employing 184 people. As economic conditions improved throughout 1936, the legislature reduced WPA rolls from 3,000,000 to 1,500,000 workers between January and August. However, a sharp recession occurred in September and October, raising the specter of a returning depression. In April Congress made three billion dollars immediately available for an expanded WPA. The WPA program ended permanently on February 1, 1943.

*"I had a WPA job and I taught. . . . In those days there were no kindergartens in schools. . . . And so I taught pre-education for about five years under one of the programs of the government."*

Caribel Washington



Caribel Washington had WPA jobs teaching music and kindergarten.



# Fixing a Flat Economy

"We'd hear these common jokes . . . about the shovel leaners or the guys who were just sitting around under a tree taking it easy. Well . . . WPA guys really did work, no question about it. The evidence is there to show you, all the roadwork they did and all the work they did on Miller Park."

Francis Irvin



Clockwise from upper left: WPA workers lay asphalt on Clayton Street. WPA work on South Main Street. Repair work is completed on Sugar Creek.

In 1937, with funds from the WPA and the sponsorship of Illinois Wesleyan University, the Bloomington Association of Commerce, and several athletic associations in the city, ground was broken for a new stadium at Wilder Field on IWU's campus. The stadium seated 3,500 spectators for football baseball and track events.



"Born in the depths of an unprecedented building depression [the project] was as welcome then as a million dollar improvement of the same nature would have been a few years later."

Dr. H.W. McPherson, President,  
Illinois Wesleyan University

## The REA

The Rural Electrification Administration was established by Roosevelt on May 11, 1935. Locally sponsored and organized by the McLean County Farm Bureau, the program brought electricity to members of the newly formed Corn Belt Electric Co-Operative. For rural McLean County residents, it meant entering the modern world. Only 1% of Illinois farms had electricity in 1923; at the end of 1935 only 30,000 were wired. By the end of 1938, more than 60,000 of the state's 200,000 farms had electricity.

McLean County rural electric customers were served by the Corn Belt Electric Co-Operative.



Workers take a break from building an REA substation.

Anxious to get electricity to their constituents, the McLean County Farm Bureau organized the project; secured members (2,700 by December 1938); engineered the program; got REA approval and \$1,164,000 in funding; and completed contracts for installing poles, stringing wire, and building substations in record time. Started on September 12, 1938, the bureau had the first lines energized by August 7, 1939.



## The NYA

The National Youth Administration, another agency within the WPA, was established June 26, 1935. Its purpose was to keep high school and college students in school and out of the labor market. It also provided education and training for future employment. The work-study funds were used to employ students in a variety of jobs in schools and on special NYA projects, such as building a nature trail at Lake Bloomington and erecting street signs and laying water mains.

The NYA established special training schools, such as the resident agriculture training school housed on the ISNU campus. The first class of 30 young men began a six-month course of study June 1, 1938. By 1940 NYA training programs particularly emphasized "mechanical pursuits."

In 1939 ISNU had 174 NYA students earning \$2,610 a month, and IWU had 65 earning \$975 per month helping instructors check papers, doing janitor work, scooping snow, doing office work and assisting in gymnasiums.

NYA participants at ISNU were required to do all their own cooking and cleaning. This included washing and ironing their clothes.



Phillip Jones, one of the NYA boys involved in a special agriculture course at Illinois State Normal University, loads hay. NYA boys at ISNU worked on the University farm from 8 a.m. to noon daily, except weekends.

*"You did whatever there was to be done after school in the evening, wash blackboards and clean erasers and whatever. . . . You had to sign up for it. They picked out the ones they thought were the most needy."*

Priscilla Brading Blakney  
on her high school NYA experience



## The Wagner Act and the NLRB

Established July 5, 1935, the Wagner Act protected collective bargaining. It established and authorized the National Labor Relations Board to supervise unionization elections and to stop unfair labor practices by employers, employees, or unions.

## The Social Security Act

Passed on August 14, 1935, Social Security Act provided old-age pensions for individuals and funds to states for unemployment and disability insurance and for aid to mothers with dependent children.

## The Fair Labor Standards Act

Established on May 23, 1938, and the last of the major New Deal measures, the act set minimum wages and maximum hours for workers.

# The Ups & Downs of the Road

Travelers through the Depression encountered many problems on their journey, but also found things to enjoy.

## Labor Unrest

New NIRA regulations guaranteed labor the right to organize and bargain collectively. That guarantee and the even stronger National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act provided workers across the nation with greater support for organizing labor unions. Local union organizers effectively formed six new labor unions by January 1935. Three more were organized later in 1935 for a total of 34 associated with the local Trades and Labor Assembly.

*"I believe this has been the biggest year for organization in 10 years. . . . Section 7a of the NRA legislation, giving labor the right of collective bargaining and compelling recognition of their spokesmen, has been a material aid."*

Fred Shoup,  
president of the local Trades and Labor Assembly, 1935

## Wage Disagreement Halts Operations at Meadows Manufacturing

Meadows Manufacturing laborers found themselves locked out of the factory on March 29, 1937, when wage negotiations between union representatives and management broke down. Workers were complaining about a 12-cent reduction in hourly wages and 72-hour work weeks without overtime allowances. Workers also accused the management of firing key union personnel. With the assistance of a federal mediator, the union negotiated a 10-cent wage increase, and operations were back to normal by April 1. A committee was also established to handle future negotiations and grievances between workers and the company.



After work ceased in the foundry department, Meadows workers gathered in front of the plant for a peaceful demonstration.

Unions usually suffer during economic depressions because members can no longer afford their dues, consequently membership declines and employers are in a better position to stifle union campaigns. During the Great Depression, however, union membership increased tremendously across the globe, 76% in ten countries and 160% in the U.S. between 1933 and 1938.

## Williams Oil-O-Matic Workers Strike Twice

In May 1934, Williams Oil-O-Matic workers attempted to unionize. Company officials refused to recognize the union. When workers picketed, management responded by closing the plant. With the assistance of a labor conciliator, management agreed to rehire workers and to discuss collective bargaining -- but with no guarantees.

Workers picketed again in 1937 when, after organizing a new union, management rejected the demand for a 60-cent minimum wage. This time, instead of closing the plant, managers responded by helping to establish a competing "company union."

In a National Labor Relief Board-supervised election, members chose the Machinists Lodge 1000 over the "company union."



Management agreed to recognize this union, and Williams workers got their first union contract. Williams Oil-O-Matic Workers stand in front of the plant entrance to keep "scab" workers out during the 1937 strike.

New strike strategies helped the movement, such as walk-outs, sit-down strikes and collective bargaining as guaranteed by the Wagner Act. In 1934 500,000 mill workers in the South used the walk-out to their advantage, while United Rubber Workers and United Auto Workers (UAW) both used the sit-down strike success-



fully in 1936. General Motors settled a strike by the UAW in 1937 through collective bargaining, which gained workers a 10% wage increase and an eight-hour/day, 40-hour workweek.

Not all strikes were as beneficial to workers, as in the example of the 1937 "Little Steel" strike in Chicago. May 30th, Memorial Day was selected as the date to hold a protest against Republic Steel and other "little steel" companies with a march from the strike headquarters to the Republic Steel gates. Chicago police fired into the crowd, killing 10 outright and wounding 80 others. Five weeks later, employees of the Inland Steel company broke the strike by returning to work without receiving any gains.

Locally, strikes and disturbances were few. Strikes at Williams Oil-O-Matic and Beich's were resolved peacefully, but at the Hayes-Custer Stove and Furnace Company, violence erupted and a worker was murdered.

In 1931, managers declared the Hayes-Custer Stove and Furnace Company an open shop. Angered union workers, unwilling to accept this policy, began picketing on May 8. Neither side was willing to make concessions, and relations between management and workers remained strained. On June 26th, members of the striking Molder's Union ambushed and beat up five "scabs" (strike-breakers). The following September, a knife fight broke out, and a rehired worker was killed by a fired worker.

McLean County Historical Society



The Hayes-Custer Stove and Furnace Company was located at 710 East Empire Street. By the end of the Depression the business had closed its doors.

#### Beich Candy Workers Strike

Unwilling to accept low wages and a hiring system that forced them to bribe supervisors to get work, Beich workers (mostly women) organized and picketed in May 1937. Workers got a six-month contract, but when it expired in December, management demanded a 20% pay cut, **abolition** of the union shop, and no overtime pay.

When the workers struck again on December 21, the Beich company cut the phone lines and said it was moving the plant to Chicago. When it attempted to move a boxcar load of sugar from the plant, workers sat down on the tracks, fearful the company was moving machinery. Strikers surrounded the factory in February, preventing the entry of replacement workers. With this victory, the union gained momentum, and Beich returned to the table and negotiated a contract.



*"Before they organized I would go down and wait for her to get off. She was supposed to get off at 8 o'clock at night, and they would have an extra run of stuff and so it might be 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning that she would get off."*

Lawrence Yeast  
on picking up his girlfriend, a Beich worker



*"Beich's was a good employer. They weren't out to get anybody; they were just trying to stay in business."*

Paul Penn



To keep up morale during the cold winter months of striking, Beich workers set up a canteen.



# The Ups & Downs of the Road

## The Dust Bowl

In addition to the economic depression, the 1930s were also known for a 25-year drought across the country. Those in the Great Plains suffered extreme drought, severe dust storms, and total devastation. The region between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River was called the "Dust Bowl." Due to poor farming practices and lack of soil conservation, millions of acres of top soil blew away in huge dust storms. In one two-day storm, Chicago was practically buried by millions of acres of top soil that had blown in from the Great Plains. The "Dust Bowl" caused an exodus of over 300,000 residents whose farms had blown away in the wind. Dubbed "Okies," these people were immortalized in John Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

## Breaking Records

Although much better off than those in the Dust Bowl, Central Illinois residents were plagued by heat waves, droughts, floods, and insect invasions during the Depression, too.

January 1936 was a record-breaking cold year. The temperature remained below zero from January 7 through February 4. On January 23, the temperature plummeted to 20 below zero. Combined with 12 inches of snow, the weather closed schools, stranded motorists, delayed trains, and knocked out electric service. During winter, coal furnaces and wood-burning stoves were used to keep homes warm. Often all but one or two rooms of a home were closed off to conserve fuel.

Dealing with heat extremes was difficult, as air conditioners did not exist. During the day, regular work activities slowed as people tried to stay cool. Some moved into their basements, where it was somewhat cooler. At night, beds were moved onto porches or out onto the lawn in hopes that a night breeze might make sleeping more tolerable.

*"Another sweltering day. . . . Things continue to burn up under the scorching sunrays. This is by far the hottest summer I ever knew . . . people are seeking places to escape the terrific high temperatures. Sleeping outdoors, on porches, in parks, in the water bathing, anywhere to keep cool. Business is at a standstill."*

Charles Morgan Diary entry, July 21, 1934

McLean County Historical Society



When heat became extreme, the opportunity to swim in a local pond was a great way to cool off for these ISSCS boys.

Man's bathing suit, c. 1935  
McLean County Historical Society



In 1934 McLean County experienced a record-setting 21 days of temperatures above 100 degrees. On the hottest day, July 24, the temperature reached 109 degrees.

In 1934 chinch bugs invaded Central Illinois fields. Crops of corn, wheat and rye were destroyed by the voracious invaders. The government supplied chinch bug oil (creosote) for free to those who ordered it. To control the pests, a farmer created a barrier consisting of a line of creosote oil on the crest of a smooth furrow



around the field, and postholes dug at 15-foot intervals along the line. The bugs crawled up to but would not cross the creosote. Instead they marched down the line into the postholes where they perished.

*"One year chinch bugs were so bad in the fields . . . the ground just moved with them. . . . And the next year after that, we had grasshoppers. . . . Dad mixed molasses and sulfa and something else together and got on the old gray horse and I saw him, he put that stuff in a cloth bag and he'd go down through the field riding the horse and swinging his arm constantly to shake it out and spread it over the corn. That was the only way you could fight that stuff in those days. And then of course we had a drought."*

Evelyn Hilton Schworer



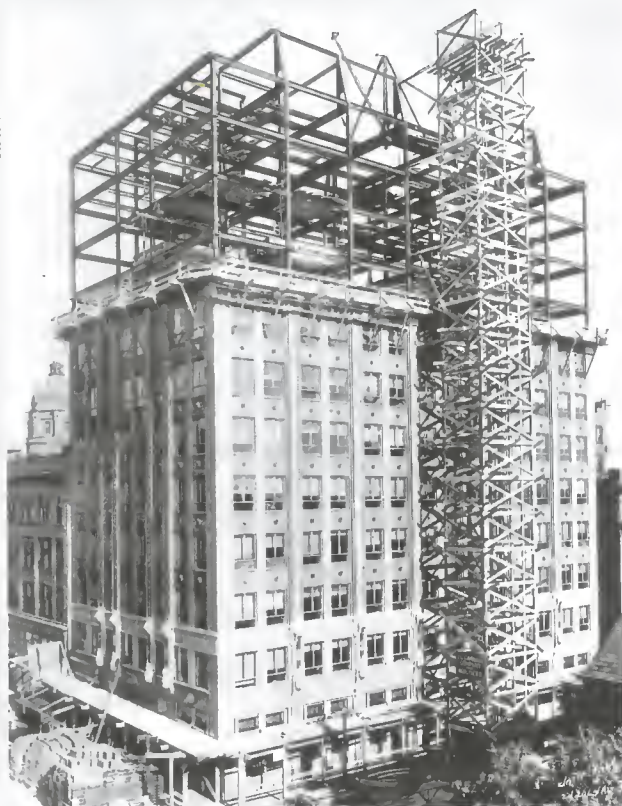
This farmer poses with his special chinch bug barrier equipment.

## Business Successes

Despite poor economic conditions, some local businesses experienced growth during the Depression. The insurance, manufacturing, and construction industries, and businesses promoting new agricultural techniques all fared well locally. Nationally, however, recovery did not occur until the beginning of World War II.

State Farm Insurance had steady growth and job gains most years of the 1930s. In 1929 State Farm had 318 local employees. By 1940 that number had increased more than 330 percent, to 1,061 people. Seventy percent of these local employees were women.

State Farm Insurance



The expansion of State Farm's home office, in downtown Bloomington, created construction jobs in 1934 when four new floors were added to the eight-story building, and again in 1938 when a north addition was begun.

Williams Oil-O-Matic was the leading world supplier of oil burners in the 1930s.

McLean County Historical Society



Williams' annual sales convention brought thousands of visitors to Bloomington in the 1930s.



# The Ups & Downs of the Road

In 1936 Beich's candy factory added 100 new employees, new equipment, and a four-story addition to its building.

McLean County Historical Society



Beich "candy girls" packaged the finished product as it came off the company's new state-of-the-art equipment.

Funk's, by the early 1930s, was marketing hybrid corn that averaged 15 bushels more per acre than open-pollinated corn.



In 1931 Walter Meers (far right) raised McLean County's first 100-bushel-per-acre crop using Funk's hybrid seed. Agriculture officials authenticate the yield in this picture. Meers tenant-farmed for G. J. Mercherle, just east of Bloomington.

Bloomington's only newspaper, the Daily Pantagraph, built a new state-of-the-art building at the corner of Madison and Washington Streets.



Construction projects, like the new Daily Pantagraph building, provided much needed work to area laborers.

across the country. The Project's director, Hallie Flanagan, stated in 1938 that 65% of the people who attended the shows had never seen a live play before.

Movies that provided escapist plots, such as *The Little Princess* with Shirley Temple and *The Wizard of Oz*, helped people to get their minds off their troubles for a little while. Segregation prevented members of the black community from enjoying the same experience.

## Entertaining Diversions

The Federal Theatre Project produced and toured theatrical productions, such as *Hansel and Gretel* and *Ready, Aim, Fire*, to audiences

"The only way you could go to the movies is if a white friend would take you to the movies. Then when you got there, they put you upstairs and him downstairs and you couldn't converse with him."

Willie Tripp





Local theaters allowed African Americans to sit only in designated areas, such as the balcony at the Majestic Theater and in the last rows of the balcony at the Irvin Theater.

Enticed with bank nights, dish giveaways, and air conditioning, residents flocked to area theaters. Some movie goers attended more shows in order to acquire an entire set of Depression glass dishes.



State Farm Insurance

The Majestic Theater (above), located at the corner of Washington and East Streets, featured films, theater, and vaudeville acts.

The Castle Theater (right) was remodeled in 1938 by adding air conditioning and upholstered seats.



The air-conditioned Normal Theater (left) opened in 1937 and showed over 300 films in its first year, not counting Saturday cartoon hours and serial chapters.



*"I used to go a lot to the Old Majestic Theater . . . they had a pipe organ . . . a newsreel, a comedy, some vaudeville. They had some very good acts in vaudeville in those days, because Bloomington, being located between St. Louis and Chicago, they'd get a lot of people on their way through."*

Preston Ensign

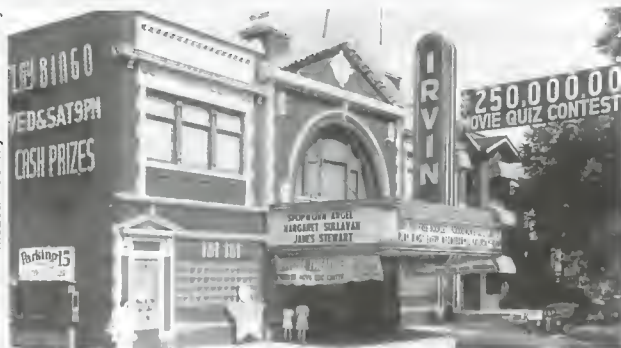


*"The big thing, of course, was to be able to go to the cartoon hour at the Castle Theater at noon, Saturday. And there would be several cartoons usually two cowboy movies and the serial. The serial was the topic of discussion on the playground the whole week, you know, how would they get out of that predicament? What was going to happen?"*

Bill Linneman

The Irvin Theater's "Bank Nights" drew large crowds hoping to win cash prizes.

McLean County Historical Society



*"I remember what they called 'Bank Night' at the Irvin Theater. They gave away money to winners in the audience. Five hundred dollars, I think . . . On those nights when the crowd would come out of the side exits, we'd get down on our hands and feet and crawl into the theater through the crowd that was leaving. Get into the movies free."*

Dave Graves

*"One of the weirdest things I ever heard of on 'Bank Night' was they asked this guy to eat a dew worm. They offered him \$50 to eat this dew worm. So this fellow goes down [to the stage] and the other guy held up this long dew worm and this guy tilts his head back and he puts it in his mouth and the other guy says you gotta chew it. Now this guy was up there chewing it and pretty soon they rushed him off stage. But I guess he got his \$50 for doing it."*

Willie Tripp

Plane travel was new and exciting in the 1930s. Sixty thousand spectators turned out for the 1936 dedication of Bloomington's new municipal airport, funded by the CWA and the Federal Relief Administration. Air derbies at the new airport featured skywriting, parachute jumping, wing walking, and relay races, and drew



Aerial view of the dedication crowds for Bloomington's new municipal airport.

# The Ups & Downs of the Road

thousands of onlookers from all across the state. For the low rate of \$1 per person, individuals were packed into a transport plane to experience the thrill of flight.

Owen Tilbury built the world's smallest plane, the Tilbury Flash, in Bloomington in 1932. The racing plane won small aircraft racing competitions while setting world speed records for its class during the early 1930s.



Owen Tilbury, (above, right) poses with Art Carnahan and the Tilbury Flash. Carnahan piloted the Flash when it won the Polish Trophy (right) at the Chicago American Air Races in 1933. During the race, he flew as fast as 120 mph—a new speed record for the plane's race class. Powered by a motorcycle engine, the Flash weighed only 390 pounds, had a 12'5" fuselage and a wingspan of 17'10". (You can see the restored Flash, and the Polish Trophy at the McLean County Museum of History.)



Locals celebrated the 1933 repeal of Prohibition in this unidentified tavern.

Community and county fairs were an opportunity for rural families to get together. Those entering projects were able to show off their skills in livestock- and crop-raising, cooking, and sewing.



Chenoa's 1938 Community Fair featured a livestock parade down Main Street.

Despite the Depression, many area residents attended the 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago. Because traveling to and from the fair could be expensive, many

*"I had about \$5 to spend. . . . I went to see the Field Museum and I think it was only 25 cents. . . . Coca-Cola had a big exhibit, they were giving away free bottles of Coca-Cola, so I drank three or four of them . . . all the automobile companies were there with some kind of an exhibit and General Electric had some kind of a science type of thing where you could see all the stuff they invented and how they did it. . . . They had steam locomotives. . . . They raced clear across the waterfront."*



Walt Bittner

Prohibition ended when the federal government amended the Volstead Act on March 22, 1933, to allow the sale of 3.2 percent beer and wine. Congress repealed the 18th Amendment shortly thereafter. The repeal of Prohibition brought drinkers back into public view.



pooled their resources, traveling in large numbers in single vehicles. Others took the train.



Normal's ISSCS Boys Band performed at the Chicago World's Fair on August 18, 1933.

Traveling circuses were a popular entertainment nation wide. Central Illinois's circus tradition included the summer arrival of big top circuses such as Cole Brothers, Hagenbeck Wallace, and Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. Those who could not afford the price of a ticket could enjoy the circus parade as it passed through town. Some boys helped feed the animals or set up equipment in order to get a ticket.

*"[A]t three o'clock in the morning dad would get all of us up out of bed, and everybody had to go down and see the circus or the carnival come to town. I never got to go to many circuses, but we saw them unload, and then they always had a big parade."*



Florence Moews Ekstam

In the 1930s, numerous trapeze artists made Bloomington and Normal their home. Bloomington was called the aerialist capital of the world. Acts spent their winters training at the Majestic Theater, the YMCA, the Ward barn, and other sites in the area. Practices were an exciting diversion for those who gathered to watch. The YMCA recruited top flyers to train

students, which resulted in the "Y" circus. Its annual performances drew large crowds, as did Illinois State Normal University's Gamma Phi Circus.

*"There was a large barn . . . and we youngsters could go out there, other people, too, and just sit on bleachers and watch the aerialists perform. There was no charge. You just watched them practice."*

Jean Stubblefield McCrossin



Local aerial artists perform in this 1936 "Y" Circus show.



1930 Gamma Phi Circus performers displayed their acrobatic skills.

In 1939 the Central Illinois Art Exposition brought rare masterpieces valued at nearly two million dollars to town. Organized and underwritten by local individuals, organizations, and businesses, the exhibit was a way to get

# The Ups & Downs of the Road

consumers into Bloomington. The wildly successful Exposition drew large crowds from across the state, including hundreds of school children.

*"Finest Art in U.S. Goes to Illinois Corn Belt"*

Life Magazine



Over 41,000 visitors paid 20 cents each to see the exhibit at the Bloomington Consistory.

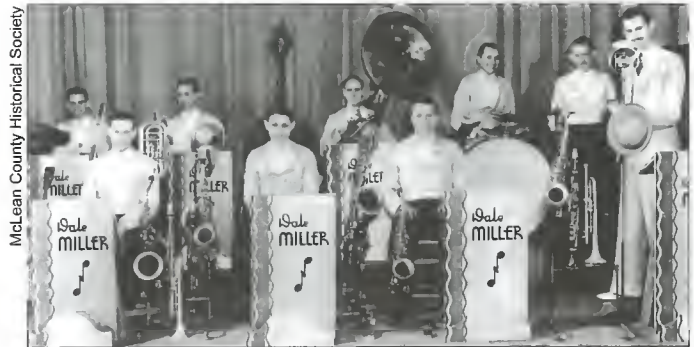
Both live and recorded music were popular diversions. Public dances where young adults could enjoy the music of live orchestras were very popular. Admission into places such as Bongo Park, the Coliseum, the Alhambra, the Edgewood Pavilion, and the Lyceum cost about 25 cents. Young adults frequently gathered at the homes of friends to dance and socialize. Audiences, both young and old, enjoyed a variety

*"Dances, no you couldn't go to them. They would announce it, but it was for the white people only. . . . We had places to go for our own entertainment. We danced a lot different than they [whites] had been taught."*

Willie Tripp



Illinois State Normal University's African American students had their own "Negro Dance" in 1932 when they could not attend the Homecoming Dance.



Bloomington's Dale Miller Band featured brothers Dale, Glenn and Ray Miller, and musicians Hank Messer, Dale Eyeman, Fred Burham, John Higgins, Al Grabs and Dale Putnam.



Bloomington's Earl GoForth led the WLS Radio house band in Chicago. His brother George also led a band, the Black and Gold Orchestra.

of regular summer performances at Miller Park, many of them free. African Americans held their own dances on the upper floors of local black-owned businesses.



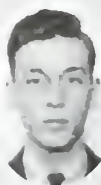
*"There were always dances on Saturday night at somebody's house. They'd roll the rugs up . . . somebody would have a piano and somebody would have a set of drums and a trumpet and a couple of guitars . . . and we'd have a dance on Saturday night."*

Carl "Bud" Ekstam



*"We lived right across from Miller Park . . . It had wonderful band concerts every Thursday night and every Sunday . . . the second half we always liked best, because that was always the magician acts and the dancing acts and soloists . . . After they were done, why the whole band would break into the Stars and Stripes Forever."*

Bill Linneman



Dance marathons provided couples with opportunities to win large cash prizes or expensive items, such as cars. The grueling contests lasted for days as participants clung to each other and the chance to win.

*"[I] went only once, because it was just gruesome. I did not enjoy watching it at all."*

Francis Irvin

*"Jennie & Gene," danced 702 hours and 5 minutes before dropping out of the "Sunny Slope" Marathon in 1932. The picture was taken prior to the contest's start.*



McLean County Historical Society

Across the country most young adults managed to find the cash for outings to their favorite hangouts. A favorite spot for Illinois State Normal University students was the Alamo where they could choose a variety of food from the restaurant's menu. The Green Mill and

Thompson's Café were two other popular hangouts.

*"[I]f you had a date and he was lucky to have any money, we could go to the show for ten cents and get a coke for a nickel apiece and so for thirty cents, we'd really have a blast. But we didn't always have that thirty cents . . . [sometimes] my date would just come into our home and we'd play games and listen to the radio."*

Ruth Holbert Steele



Sports enthusiasts who could afford it found their diversions in local competitive athletics. Thousands of fans showed up for annual Golden Gloves boxing tournaments held at the Coliseum or the YMCA. Winners of the local tournament advanced to the Chicago tournament and possible fame and fortune.



On Thursday, February 13, 1936, over 2,800 area fans crowded the Bloomington Coliseum to witness a Golden Gloves boxing tournament. Eight champions were crowned: Nick Veselak (Bloomington), flyweight; Jack Whittinghill (Bloomington), bantam weight; Johnny Cali (Streator), featherweight; Snyder Parham (Bloomington), lightweight; Bill Foli (Bloomington, former Trinity football player), welterweight; Glenn Potter (Pontiac and only 16), middleweight; Tommy Sutherland (ISNU student), light heavyweight; Winfield Bates (ISNU football player), heavyweight.

Regional baseball leagues, such as the Indiana, Illinois & Iowa League (the Three-Eye League), drew only small crowds at Fans Field

# The Ups & Downs of the Road

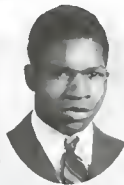
during the Depression; few could afford the 40-cent ticket price. Bad economic conditions shut down the league from 1932 to 1935 and again in 1936. Local organizations that didn't charge admission, such as the Normal Baseball or Colfax Baseball League, had regular crowds.

Fans who could not afford tickets or get in did whatever possible to see their favorite team.



Spectators line up at the Fans Field entrance gate to pay the 40 cent admission fee for Three-Eye baseball.

*"They did not allow Negroes to go to those games. Most of the time, after the games got started and if there weren't too many security people on the outside of the fences, then we would sneak up and look through the holes in the fences. But you couldn't go into most of the games."*



Willie Tripp

Local fans enjoyed football and basketball rivalries between Illinois State Normal University and Illinois Wesleyan University. The competition was intense, as both universities were in the same conference. In 1932 the Wesleyan football team completed the season with its goal line uncrossed, winning the Little 19 Football Conference title. They repeated their success again in 1933 and 1935. Illinois State University won the 1933 Little 19 Basketball title.

McLean County Historical Society



IWU's 1933 Little Nineteen Football Champions

Front row: Coach Elliott, Henry, Weger, G. Campbell, Bedell, Veldi, Leach, Benson, Kaska, R. Neuman, Cutlip, Sweat, Kosovilka, Assistant Coach Craig. Middle row: McCray, Frederickson, Appleton, Wassenhove, Anderson, McMackin, Wunderlich, Summerfelt, Crinfield, Dunmire, Bouma, Bates, Skinner. Back row: Lindquist, Hawkins, Swanson, Rea, H. Sweasy, Hill, Boles, Kaiser, W. Neuman, C. Campbell, Thornton, O'Malley, Fox, Oestmann, Smerz.

McLean County Historical Society



ISU's 1933 Little Nineteen Basketball Champions

Back row: Coach Hill, Bowers, Keefe, Coach Cogdal, Jacobson, Rhodes, Manager Carter. Front row: Jacquat, White, H. Adams, Barton, Goff, Fitzgerald, D. Adams, Davis.

Even with a lack of material belongings, children accepted life as it was and managed to enjoy their youth. Children played together on the street or in their neighborhood parks. Some parks had organized craft activities, funded by New Deal programs. Roller skating, playing ball, sledding, and games like "kick the can" or "run, sheep, run" were popular pastimes. Swimming at Miller Park was good, clean fun, if you were white. Blacks had to use a mud beach on the east side of the lake with no life-guard, and no bathhouse.

*"The swimming was on the east side [for blacks] and the others were on the west side. That was the way it was back in those days. And you just took it with a grain of salt."*

Willie Tripp





Both girls and boys enjoyed organized craft activities at Fell Park.



Soapbox Derbies were very popular. These boys salvaged parts for their soapbox derby cars.

## The Golden Days of Radio

From soap operas and comedies to children's adventure programs and political commentators, family members looked forward to gathering around the radio. Many rural homes did not

*"I remember our first radio was an Atwater Kent. And it was a huge box that was on the shelf and then there were batteries in the basement. And you'd invite somebody over, because not everyone had one. And it would squawk and not perform the minute they walked in."*

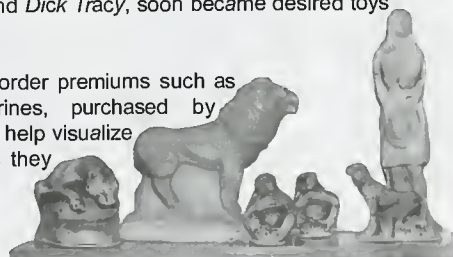
Alice Cherry



have electricity and so depended on large batteries to run their radios. Children raced home from school to catch favorite radio programs, such as *The Lone Ranger*, *Buck Rogers*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Dick Tracy*, and *Jack Armstrong - the All-American Boy*.

Off shoots of popular radio programs, such as *Little Orphan Annie*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Dick Tracy*, soon became desired toys and games.

Children could mail-order premiums such as these Tarzan figurines, purchased by Margaret Poulton, to help visualize the radio characters they enjoyed most.



Margaret Poulton Esposito

Adults found radio programming informative as well as entertaining. President Roosevelt made very effective use of radio with his "Fireside Chats", informal talks to the nation about his administration's programs. The first, explaining the bank crisis, aired on March 12, 1933.

*"Whenever Roosevelt was going to make a fireside chat [Father] let everybody in the family know and you couldn't go away until the fireside chat was over."*

Francis Irvin



### Vic n Sade

Written by Bloomington-Normal native Paul Rhymer and set in Bloomington-Normal, *Vic n Sade* was one of many popular comedy serials. The NBC radio show illuminated the humorous aspects of home life for the average American businessman and his wife.

*"Oh, the script doesn't say 'Bloomington' or 'Normal,' but the street names are the same, as are the place names and the family names, and everybody knows who Paul Rhymer is writing about when NBC airs its top daily serial, Vic n Sade."*

Don Munson



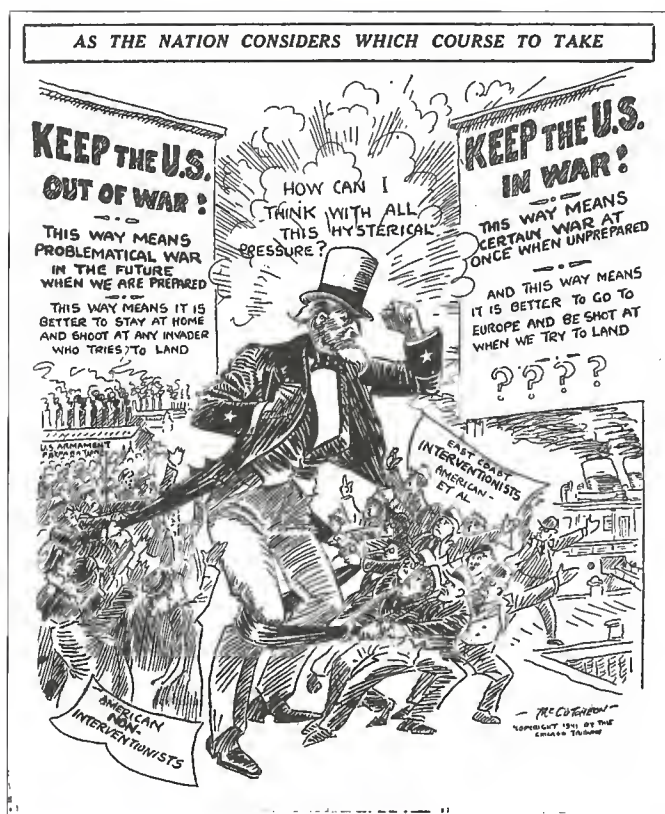
Paul Rhymer (left) posed for a publicity photo with the characters of *Vic n Sade*.

The area's first radio station, WJBC, moved to Bloomington from LaSalle in 1934, establishing its first studio on the Wesleyan campus. The station made its debut from ISNU in 1935. By the late 1930s, it was in an upper floor of the Castle Theater. The station carried both local and NBC network programs.

# The Impending War and Journey's End

## The War Economy

U.S. citizens struggled with the desire to stay neutral during the 1930s as Hitler rose to power in Germany and World War II began in Europe and Asia.



"I remember the invasion of Poland. . . it was just hard to believe that one nation would decide that they was going to invade Poland and take over Czechoslovakia. . . I was with that large mass of people identified as the isolationists. In those days I just believed, "That's Europe's problem, we should not get involved. On the other hand, I respected Roosevelt's foresight in doing the Lend-Lease program to aid Britain."



Francis Irvin

In 1935 Congress passed and Roosevelt signed the Neutrality Act, designed to keep the U.S. out of a possible European war by banning the shipment of war materials to nations at war.

Seeley Mudd Archive, Princeton University

## Defend America Aid The Allies STOP HITLER NOW

*Read this petition.  
Then stop and sign it.*

*We believe that the security of the United States is threatened by the wars in Europe, Africa and Asia.*

*We believe that a victory for Hitler over Great Britain would clear the way for his attack upon America.*

*We believe that those who are now resisting Hitler should be strengthened in every way.*

*We believe that the United States must at once take all steps to mobilize completely the man power and the material resources of the nation.*

*We accordingly call upon the President and Congress*

- (1) To render at once all possible support to Great Britain.
- (2) While Great Britain holds the enemy at bay, to take all necessary steps for the complete mobilization of the man power and the material resources of the nation.

**This Petition will be sent to the Government  
at Washington by the Committee to Defend  
America by Aiding the Allies.  
117 S. Broad St., Philadelphia KINGSLEY 0414**

## How Can the Dictators Attack Us If They Win in Europe?

- (1) We'll be forced into a bankrupting armaments race.
- (2) They'll undermine our standard of living.
  - (a) By making our gold valueless.
  - (b) By seizing our foreign markets.
  - (c) By making our workers compete with their slave labor.
  - (d) By starving our factories of essential raw materials—rubber, tin, chrome ore, manganese—all of which are now controlled by the British Empire and the countries of South America.

The White Committee distributed many flyers and pamphlets such as this one.

The legislation arose from the isolationist views of many Americans that the U.S. should never have been involved in World War I. German activities in Europe increased fears of another world war, and in 1936 the act was amended to ban loans, as well.



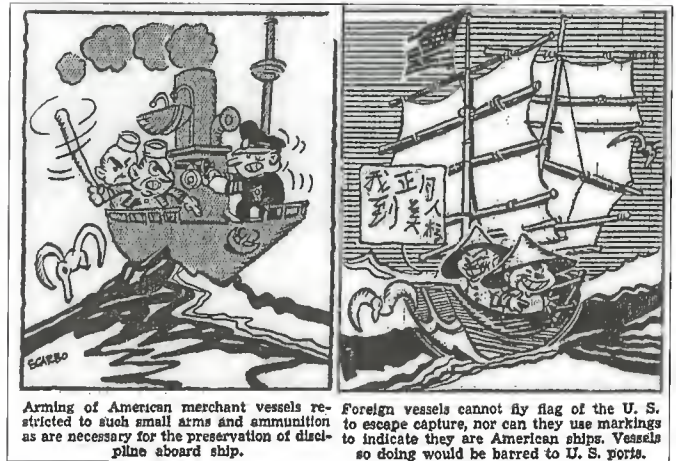
When Germany invaded Poland, some Americans, believed the best way to defend America from a second world war was to provide aid for the European allies. Bloomington native, Adlai Stevenson II, urged Americans to see beyond their isolationist views. He believed the United States should aid its European allies facing Nazi threats and worked for that cause through the White Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.

By the late 1930s, few doubted that U.S. involvement was imminent. Preparations were already underway to enable military traffic to move quickly across the country. Route 66, the major highway between St. Louis and Chicago, was undergoing dramatic changes that would reroute traffic around communities. A four-lane bypass on the east side of Bloomington-Normal was completed in 1938.



In 1938 workers put the finishing touches on the four-lane Beltline Road (now Veterans Parkway) on the east side of Bloomington-Normal. Curves on the southeast and southwest corners of the road were designed for 110-mile-per-hour traffic.

In 1939, however, Congress again amended the Neutrality Act to allow the U.S. to supply warring Allies. American companies, including Bloomington's Williams Oil-O-Matic, tooled up their factories, hired additional workers and



McLean County residents learned about the Neutrality Act through editorial cartoons printed in the *Daily Pantagraph*.

began war production. The effects proved dramatic. Wartime efforts brought about full employment and, in doing so, achieved what New Deal programs had been unable to do. In 1940 there were eight million Americans unemployed. One year later, unemployment had dropped dramatically, and some industries were suffering labor shortages. As a result, more and more women entered the workforce.

# Looking Back on the Journey

## *The Individual Experience*

The road through the Great Depression was a rocky one for millions of Americans, including thousands of McLean County residents.

With little cash and limited work opportunities, individuals and families were forced to be resourceful and frugal. Recycling and saving



Many families found themselves living day to day.

small things, such as string, aluminum foil, and rubber bands for reuse was a prevalent way to save money and resources. Many survivors of the Great Depression never lost that fear of going without. Having large gardens, canning large stores of fruits, vegetables and meat, and



Even after the Depression, many families continued to grow and can vegetables, such as green beans.

saving inconsequential items often turned into hoarding. Even after the Depression many continued to be frugal and to hoard objects, despite having a comfortable and steady income. In one survivor's home, the family found a box filled with bits of string labeled, "*string too short to save.*"

## *The National Experience*

It was on that journey that U.S. citizens began to understand that growth is essential not only for economic prosperity but also for social harmony and justice. It was during the Depression that Americans began to accept that government must promote our country's economic stability and provide a safety net for the unemployed and needy. These are the legacies of the Great Depression. Although Americans



have experienced periods of deep recession, high unemployment, and other economic woes since the 1930s, because of these legacies there has been no great depression since the end of *The Great Depression*.

**Legacy programs:**

- Unemployment insurance
- Assistance to the poor (Welfare)
- Old-age assistance (Social Security)
- Insurance for bank deposits (FDIC/FSLIC)
- Regulation of financial markets
- Subsidies for agricultural production
- Protection of right of labor to organize

# *Topics for discussion and further research*

**An overall theme of the Great Depression was “doing without.”**

1. What could you do without if America experienced a similar economic crisis? Make a list.
2. Now look at your list. Which of those items were not available to anyone in the 1930s?
3. Since you are “doing without” these things, what would you do instead?

**“Alcoholized” gasoline was introduced as an alternative to petroleum during the Depression.**

1. What is “alcoholized” gasoline? What do we call it today?
2. How is “alcoholized” gasoline made?
3. What part does ethanol play in our culture today? Why is it particularly significant to those living here in McLean County or central Illinois?

**Electricity usage, plumbing and sanitation were critical issues to the rural families of McLean County in the 1930s.**

1. Find out when electricity came to Bloomington and Normal, and to rural areas of McLean County or central Illinois.
2. What organizations or corporations are responsible for providing electricity, water and sanitation needs to local citizens? How are these utilities funded?

**Kids growing up in the 1930s enjoyed a variety of social activities.**

1. In what ways do kids today socialize and how do those methods compare to the 1930s?

**Many World War I veterans had been promised a bonus for serving overseas, to be paid in 1945. When the Depression hit, they asked the government for the pay to help solve their financial problems. Visit <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/snprelief4.htm> (Also read *The Bonus Army*, written by Paul Dickson and Thomas Allen.)**

1. Should the World War Veterans have received their bonuses early or not?
2. What happened to the “Bonus Army” in 1932?

**The Community Chest collected money from individuals to re-distribute among other charities during the Depression.**

1. What agency was the successor of the Community Chest and how does it serve our community today?
2. What other agencies in your town help people with needs?



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**Part of the government's program to help farmers was the concept of "set aside land."**

1. What did this mean and how was it beneficial?
2. Does it continue today? See if you can find news stories related to agricultural subsidies today.

**Segregation and "Jim Crow" laws were commonplace across the country in the 1930s.**

1. How did these laws affect politics, economics and social interactions?
2. How did African Americans deal with these issues and what national organizations supported their efforts?
3. What local or central Illinois groups or organizations supported African Americans in these efforts?

**Business and industry were dramatically changed by the Great Depression.**

1. What local businesses and industries were the big employers during the 1930s?
2. Compare these to the major local businesses of the 21st century.
3. Which of these businesses continued to operate in Central Illinois from the 1930s to the present time?
4. How has technology affected the changes in these businesses?

**Union membership typically decreased during economic crises. But across the nation union membership grew dramatically during the Great Depression.**

1. What unions represented workers here in central Illinois?
2. How many or what percentage of workers were represented in unions locally in the 1930s?
3. What is union membership today?
4. What are causes that led to that decline?
5. What are some issues facing unions today?

**The United States struggled with opposing views about becoming involved in World War II.**

1. What were the opposing views?
2. Identify a government that supports isolationism and one that promotes nation-building and explain the position of each government.

# Glossary

**Abolition** - in labor issues, elimination of a union by the management of a business.

**Association of Commerce** - An organization of business owners and employees working together to promote the welfare of the community and its businesses.

**Barter** - to exchange or trade goods and services, rather than purchasing them with money.

**Cash Flow** - availability of on hand printed money.

**Commodity** - products such as sugar, butter, wheat, or corn, offered or traded on the stock exchange.

**Deflation** - the abnormal decline in the level of prices for goods and services, especially a decline that is not accompanied by an equal reduction in the costs of production.

**Depression** - a period during which business, employment and stock market values decline or remain at a low level of activity; the economic crisis and period of low business activity in the U.S. and other countries, roughly beginning with the stock market crash of October 1929 and continuing through the 1930s.

**Disposable Income** - the part of a person's remaining income after paying income taxes and bills.

**Economy** - the management of the resources of a country, especially the productivity, prosperity and earnings of that country, e.g., if many goods and services are bought and sold, the economy, or management of resources, is strong.

**Foreclosure** - the act of depriving a mortgage holder of the right to redeem his property, especially on failure to make payments on the mortgage, e.g., a bank repossesses land if the farmer doesn't make his payments on time.

**Hobo** - a person who wanders about and has no permanent home or employment; a vagrant.

**Isolationism/Isolationist** - the policy or doctrine of isolating one's country from the affairs of other nations by declining to enter into alliances, foreign economic commitments, international agreements, etc. / a person who supports this policy or doctrine.

**Inflation** - a substantial rise in prices caused by an undue expansion in paper money or bank credit.

**Layoff** - an interval of enforced unemployment; e.g., to save money on salaries, a company may lay off part of its workforce for a short period of time, but will often re-hire those people before hiring new ones.

**Market stability** - the stock market's resistance to sudden change or deterioration.

**Pension** - a fixed amount paid for past services.

**Privy** - an outhouse; a small outbuilding constructed over a pit that serves as a toilet.

**Prohibition** - the period from 1920 to 1933, when the sale of alcoholic beverages in the U.S. was forbidden by the 18th amendment to the Constitution.

**Relief** - money, food or other help given to those in poverty or need, now known as welfare.

**Runs (on banks)** - to make many withdrawals in rapid succession, causing a bank's cash on hand to be depleted.

**Scrip** - a certificate to be exchanged for goods or services.

**Stock market/exchange** - the market for securities, especially stocks, throughout a nation; the place where stocks and other securities are bought and sold. Or, an association of brokers and dealers in stocks and bonds who meet together and transact business according to fixed rules, such as the New York Stock Exchange or Nasdaq.

**Union** - a number of workers coming together for the common purpose of establishing favorable working conditions with the management of a company.

Adapted from Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, c.1983.



**Journey through the Great Depression  
Educational Loan Kit**

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